A Little Bird Told Me

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/9988163.

Rating:	Mature
Archive Warning:	Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings
Categories:	F/F, M/M
Fandoms:	Hannibal (TV), Hannibal Lecter Series - All Media Types
Relationships:	Will Graham/Hannibal Lecter, Ardelia Mapp/Clarice Starling
Characters:	Will Graham, Hannibal Lecter, Clarice Starling, Ardelia Mapp, Jack Crawford, Frederick Chilton
Additional Tags:	Season 4 Dreams, Implied/Referenced Character Death, Fake Character Death, BAMF Clarice Starling, incarceration, Touching, Will being protective of Clarice, Implied Sexual Content, Slow Dancing, Silence of the Lambs References, Movie: The Silence of the Lambs (1991), Heartbreak, Metaphors, Mind Palace, Mind Games, Hannibal is Hannibal, Ardelia has the most sense of anyone, Chilton Being an Asshole, Jack Crawford Being an Asshole, Angst with a Happy Ending, Eventual Happy Ending, Will Loves Hannibal, Hannibal Loves Will, the teacup does come back together
Language:	English
Series:	Part 1 of Silence of the Lambs AU
Collections:	#HannibalEverAfter, HannibalPostFallFanfics, hannigram to save the day
Stats:	Published: 2017-02-27 Words: 12,514 Chapters: 4/4

A Little Bird Told Me

by harleygirl2648

Summary

Season 4 AU. Hannibal Lecter and Will Graham were married and living happily in Cuba together when the FBI catches up to them in a shootout. When both come to in the hospital, they are told the other one is dead and are placed back the in the BSHCI.

One year later, Buffalo Bill is out there skinning girls, and Jack Crawford deploys his new trainee, Clarice Starling against the darkest minds he still has access to. Will Clarice become the prey, or will she take control of the chessboard and find Catherine Martin?

Notes

Whew, so this is a compilation of the works I have for my #HannibalEverAfter collection, which you can find in my works if you're interested to see what else I've written for this month.

These first three chapters are backstory, which I recommend you read before you jump in with Clarice. Please enjoy, loves!

The Twelve Dancing Princesses

Will stands outside the door to their home in Cuba. He can smell the dinner cooking, hear the sounds of their dog yipping and an opera record in the player.

He savors all of these feelings and treasures them in his heart, and then pushes the door open. It's not locked, they don't have to lock the door here. Anyone would be a fool *(and tomorrow's dinner)* to dare enter without permission and ruin what they have.

Will removes his shoes and sets them beside the door on a special mat, and their dog barks in delight as she races over to sniff him. Will laughs, petting the dog on the head and rubbing her stomach.

"Will?" Hannibal calls from the kitchen.

"Sorry, *darlin',"* Will teases, knowing that Hannibal Lecter does not blush, but his face is notably warmer whenever he calls him that. "Cephy wanted attention. But I know you do, too, one minute." He pets Cephy on top of the head one last time before heading into the dining room, dog following at his heels.

Will's heart warms as he watches Hannibal looked up from arranging the roses in the handblown black vase that Will had given him for their anniversary that past year. Hannibal has that glorious smile on his face, and walks over to Will, pulling him into a deep kiss. Will's fingers reach up, pulling his the longer, silvery hair just the way Hannibal liked, making him chuckle softly. After he needed to breathe, he tries to pull away, only for Hannibal to press his face against his neck.

"Will," he sighed, his hand gently rubbing at a hard knot in Will's neck. "My love, you've been away for so long."

"Just all day, Hannibal," Will says fondly, knowing that Hannibal hates being described as clingy even though it suits him perfectly.

"That's why I made a special dinner," Hannibal smiles, pulling away at last, leaning to the side to pull out Will's chair for him. Will rolled his eyes, but sat down anyways. Hannibal leans down and kisses him on the cheek before going into the kitchen.

Will grabs a few of the prosciutto roses off of the table and gave them to Cephy, but he was caught as Hannibal came back into the dining room with the plates.

"At the *table,* Will? She already has some in her dinner dish."

Will only winks at him as Hannibal sets the plate down in front of him.

"Coq au vin, made with Burgundy bottled in your birth year, and a side of Swiss chard with crumbles of goat cheese, and just a *hint* of pomegranate juice reduction," Hannibal murmurs

in his ear, sending chills down Will's spine as he slowly pours the sauce over the dish. *"Bon appétit."*

Hannibal then takes his own seat across from Will, staring into his eyes. Will smiles like he has a secret, as he spears a piece of the meat and swirling it in the blood-red sauce. Then he carefully lifts the forkful to his mouth, pulling the meat off with his teeth and chews it slowly.

Hannibal looks as though he is holding his breath.

"Delicious," Will smirks. Hannibal looks at him with such fondness that he can feel it spreading through his body, warming like the wine the dish was soaked in.

They eat in this way for what felt like hours, staring into each other's souls as they took bites of the delicious food until the air felt thick with wine and lust. As if on cue, Hannibal stands up just in time for the record to end.

"Do you care to dance, Will?" he asks, flipping through the record collection before selecting the perfect one. Will nodded, unable to fight the smile or deny Hannibal this simple joy. Hannibal takes his hand and kisses it gently before pulling him into his arms, a hand tracing patterns on his lower back. The dance is slow, no fancy steps that Hannibal has spent the past few weeks teaching Will. In fact, it seems like they are just swaying back and forth in tune to the music. The tension is thick like the smudge of compote on the corner of Will's mouth, and Hannibal kisses it off, savoring the sweet flavor. They both break at the same time, clutching so desperately at each other, as though they were smoke that would slip through their fingers. Hannibal kisses him hard, stealing his breath away, and immediately Will feels his knees wanting to give out.

Most days felt like they ended this way. But they always got here differently. Sometimes Hannibal interrupted dinner, letting it get cold while he dragged Will over to the couch. Sometimes Will barely got in the front door before Hannibal has him pressed up against it, he got desperate when Will was away, letting dinner burn in the oven as he covers every inch of exposed skin in kisses. Funny how he always prided himself on patience until he finally had Will. Sometimes he wanted Will to be in control, and on those occasions, Will probably could have slowly choked Hannibal to death and he would have let him.

Sometimes it wasn't necessarily sexual when Will got back home. Sometimes they ended the night with just dancing and then reading in bed for hours while Cephy tried to crawl under the blankets. Will always let her.

But now it is the exact opposite of those times. Now it is urgent they go upstairs, *now.*

"Bed," Hannibal purrs against his mouth, and Will nods, unable and unwilling to let go of Hannibal. He smiles, pressing another kiss to Will's lips, a softer one this time, before guiding them both up the stairs. They don't stop kissing the entire way.

"Hannibal," Will hisses, trying to not bust his ankle but really, really, not wanting him to stop kissing him. "Why - why the *fuck* did we buy a house with a spiral staircase?"

His husband only smirked as he pushed him harder against the very thin stair rail. For a split second Will thought Hannibal would actually bend him over the rail backwards and kiss him. It would not be out of character.

“Elegance,” is Hannibal’s answer to Will’s question. “And it allows me to do *this.”* And then without a single warning, he physically lifts him up into his arms, causing Will to laugh, feeling dizzy and slightly drunk on Burgundy and lust. He gets another kiss, and then another, and then he lost track until he feels his back hit the bed. He opens his eyes and smiles at Hannibal, who is gazing at him in complete rapture.

“You can touch, doctor,” Will teases, stretching out in the expensive sheets, groaning softly. *“Please.”*

Hannibal lunges forward, ending up on top of Will and kissing the air right out of his lungs.

“You are my life, Will,” Hannibal murmurs against his ear. “You know that?”

“Conjoined,” Will breathes out. “Can’t survive separation. Love is too small a word, but I love you so much. Love you so much.”

“And I worship the very ground you walk on, Will.”

Will laughs, it’s so perfect, laying in this bed, so *hopelessly* in *love.* “You - you can just tell me that you love me, Hannibal.”

“I refuse to be so passé,” is the muffled response Will gets as Hannibal pops open his shirt button, kissing him there. He pauses for a moment before pulling himself back up, hovering just above his lips.

“I love you, Will.” And then they share the softest, gentlest kiss. One that slowly gets more heated, more intense....

and they start going lower, and lower, and *lower...*

“Fuck...please, Hannibal, please, don’t stop, don't stop.”

“Will.”

“Hannibal.”

“Will.”

“Hannibal.”

“Will.”

“Haaannibal....”

“Will!”

Will’s eyes shot open then, sitting straight up and groaning as he felt the cold, uncomfortable mattress of the cot in his cell. He stretched his neck out, wiped the downpour of sweat off of his forehead. Not fucking again, he thought with gritted teeth as he glared over at where Frederick was staring from the other side of the bars.

“Enjoying your *show,* Frederick?” he chose to say, knowing that the doctor was easiest to deal with when he was flustered. “What - what do you want?”

Frederick visibly bit his lip, trying to find the best way to broach the subject, deciding eventually to go with, “You were moaning Hannibal's name in your sleep. *Again.”*

“Yeah? Good thing I got the shame knocked out of me in that cliff dive,” Will snapped, trying to get his breathing under control. The endorphins rushing through his veins faded fast at the sight of Frederick’s smug face. Every time he was woken up from dreaming, it felt like a rug had been yanked out from under him, like he was falling off another cliff but with no support this time.

“I’m changing your medication, you shouldn’t be sleeping so much, it’s not good for you.”

“I have worse nightmares when I’m awake,” Will said, staring at the tan line on his ring finger. The wedding ring was long gone, Jack probably had it melted down or something ridiculous like that. They had taken it when he was in the hospital, after he woke up with a new bullet scar, after he found out that Hannibal was - was -

“You’ve been having these dreams for *weeks,* Will, it’s not healthy for you to still be-”

“In mourning for my *dead husband?”* he shot back. Frederick took a deep breath and then tried to look sympathetic.

“Will, you know you can tell me if-”

“All you want to do is grasp at my mind like how a nervous virgin grasps at a pair of panties on prom night,” Will rolled his eyes, forcing down bitter, angry tears. Instead, brittle laughter came out.

“And *please,* Frederick,” Will said, stretching back out onto the cot, sighing deeply like he was remembering something (someone) better (he was), “I wouldn’t trade years of name brand for the *cheap knockoff.”*

He turned over to his side, facing the wall. “I’m going back to sleep, Frederick, don’t wake me up. Ever again.”

Frederick opened his mouth to snark back when his phone rang.

“We’ll discuss this in your next session, Will.”

“Don’t get too excited,” was the only reply.

Frederick sneered then, answering the phone as he left Will alone. “Jack? No, I didn’t get to tell him, he was - well, never mind, doctor-patient confidentiality, you know. Just make sure you brief your new...trainee... on Will. Tell your new canary about her coalmine before you drop her in here blindly. And warn her that he’s going to be in a *very* bad mood in the morning.”

“Will?”

Will is back in Cuba now, back in bed, back where they left off, but it is bittersweet now. He can't stop the tears from falling, even as Hannibal kisses them away softly.

“Will, I’m here. I’m here, love, don’t cry.”

“No,” Will whispers, his voice sounding as though it would shatter like glass if he spoke above a certain volume. “You’re not here. Not anymore. I - I miss you, Hannibal, I need you back. Please come back.”

Hannibal pulls away then, looking Will deeply in the eyes before brushing away the hair in his face and kissing him long and slow. He then curls up beside Will, pulling him close to his chest and Will almost starts to cry again. He presses against Hannibal, his eyes squeezed as tightly together as possible, and then everything is just a breath away from being real.

“I’m always here, Will. All you have to do is close your eyes and go back to sleep.”

Iron John

Hannibal should have spent more time drawing Will's eyes. They were always his finest quality, always seeing more than everyone else could, and he had Hannibal melting with a single glance. He could never find the correct mixture of blue and green to color the irises.

For all the hours and all the days spent gazing into them, he didn't draw those eyes nearly enough. Oh, he had drawn Will plenty of times since they had taken the cliff dive together, but he was more concerned with drawing every single inch of him. He'd never had the chance to be in this proximity to him before, willingly, and it had been intoxicating. It led to several pictures abandoned in the middle of drawing, as his gorgeous muse simply wouldn't sit still.

Hannibal had asked Jack with a completely straight face from behind his cell if he could have those drawings back. "The ones in the bedside dresser drawer, if you please."

Jack had only glared.

The pictures were long gone, probably burned to a crisp. Cremated and scattered on the winds. Perhaps those ashes would find their way and would mix with Will's. He had not survived, Hannibal was told.

Hannibal would have preferred the same fate. That way, he wouldn't be sitting here in this cell, trying to draw Will's eyes from memory alone. He wouldn't have the image of Will's unsteady breathing as he gently brushed the hair out of his eyes while trying not to vomit from the bullet wound in his lower stomach, *it's - fuck, god, ahh - ah-alright, Hannibal, I'll - I'll be f-fine, I pr-promise.*

Does it hurt more to know that someone was lying to you, or to know that they were lying and wake up in a hospital bed still believing them anyway?

Hannibal was undecided on the matter.

He had been stone faced when he had received the news, but inside it was as though God had collapsed in the roof of the Norman Chapel inside his mind. And he was trapped in the debris, unwilling to free himself. The teacup was definitely shattered now. Nothing short of a miracle could ever bring it back together again.

Frederick tried to have sessions with him, Hannibal would only laugh at him. It was play psychiatry, it was *cute.* Frederick would get snippy like an indignant child and try to get under his skin. A small pun about charred meat would usually send him scurrying for a few days.

He was glad, he wanted to be alone with his drawings of Will. Will was gone, he knew he was in the denial stage of grief, and he didn't know how long it would last. At last count, he'd been in this stage for a year since their happy ending was abruptly ground to a halt.

Will.

There were significantly less privileges than last time in this cell. For example, he was only allowed ten books at a time. He had requested an extensive collection of fairytales. Frederick tried to read into it, Hannibal just let him talk.

He was currently fixed on the tale of Iron John, where no one was to let the terrifying man out of the cage. But then one prince did. His other adventures were not nearly as intriguing as this one action. One of complete selfishness, a trait scarcely rewarded in fairy tales.

And how at the end, Iron John's true self was revealed because he was freed by someone with pure of heart.

Hannibal sat back in his cot and pondered this matter.

It never said that the heart had to be pure good. Pure could mean that one had clear motives for their actions, damn everyone else to hell.

Achilles wished all Greeks would die so that he and Patroclus could conquer Troy alone. Took divine intervention to bring them down.

Will had set them both free that day, from Hannibal's physical cell and from the restraints of their environment. He *chose* him, chose this life with *him.*

"I don't know if I can save myself," Will had admitted as Hannibal opened a bottle of wine. "Maybe that's just fine."

He'd set them both free, even if he thought they would die together. It hadn't mattered to him, he had freed *both* of them. Hannibal reenacted the scene in his mind so many times, as it had been the only time in his life he had felt something akin to religious ecstasy.

Frederick had said that Jack had a trainee that he would bring in to meet with him, if he'd like that. Hannibal said he would *love* to meet with her.

He wanted a new mind to tear apart, and Jack always had the best minds around him. A young woman trainee. Jack was a fool to bring anyone here. He hoped that she would be special enough to be entertaining for a few visits. He planned to warp her mind enough that she'd end up here with him, and Jack would have to see the results of his new failure.

Apparently, this new trainee empathized well with the victims, not the killers. An interesting technique, he would use that against her. All he had to do was wait for her.

Hannibal is walking in his mind palace, now, into the Norman chapel. He pauses at the top of aisle, observing the holy scene before him.

Will stands before the altar, his back to Hannibal, holding two chalices in his hands as his head is tilted back, letting the sunlight warm him through the stained glass. Hannibal walks slowly down the aisle, mindful as one should be before holy communion.

He finally comes side to side with Will, looking at him with reverence. Will's eyes are closed, but he opens them as he feels Hannibal's presence.

"I missed you," he says gently, staring at the crucifix on the altar. He has teased Hannibal before how much it resembles him. "Where do you go during the day, away from me, away from here?"

"Back to the reality of our fate," Hannibal says in response, staring at the crucifix as well. "Cruel as it is."

"Then stay here," Will says, a hint of pleading in his voice. He turns to Hannibal then, offering the chalice in his right hand. Hannibal accepts it, inhaling the aroma of the liquid inside.

Blood.

Will raises his own chalice to Hannibal, gesturing at the one in Hannibal's hand. "My blood, shed for you."

"And mine, shed for you."

Will nods, closing his eyes and taking a long, slow drink. Hannibal does the same. It's harsh, and bitter, and every kind of blasphemous, and it tastes so sweet.

When they both stop, there is blood all over their mouths. It runs down their chins and stains the white suit Hannibal is wearing and the black dress shirt Will wears as they both drop the heavy chalices to the ground with a loud clang before they embrace each other.

"Broken for you," Hannibal manages to say against Will's lips. "My body, my mind, my soul, broken for you."

Will repeats the words back to him like they are praying, and they are, in their own way. Then they are kissing, and it is heavy, and bloody, and everything feels like it's burning around them. Hannibal dares God to drop the ceiling on them now, he has every intention of having Will right here.

"Hannibal, we're not - not on the altar," Will manages to laugh a little. It's a sound Hannibal misses, misses so much, and lets Will gently take his hand as they walk down the aisle of the chapel. Hannibal thinks they will go to the house in Cuba tonight.

Hannibal does not move as he lies on the prison cot, but his eyes move behind his eyelids they way a cat does while it dreams.

The White Dove

Will Graham faints in his cell. He has not touched a tray of food in three days, and barely taken more than a few swallows of water.

It hasn't occurred to him that he isn't residing in the real world when he's in his head. For all he knows, he's still on that month-long visit to Paris. In his mind, he collapses from exhaustion after Hannibal slits the throat of the French woman leaning on his arm from before. Hannibal claimed they were having *dove* for dinner that night, a rare treat.

He blinks awake, strapped to a gurney in the medical ward in the BSHCI. The world does not stop spinning for minutes as he hears hushed whispering around him.

"Why aren't you eating, Will?"

"Fuck off, Frederick." Will doesn't bother with filters anymore. He swears he can almost hear Frederick biting the inside of his cheek to save face. Not that there's much to save, he thinks, letting out a laugh that is positively eerie. "Should take out your other kidney."

There's no snappy response this time, just a hand of one of the guards holding his head down as a plastic tube touches his nose as warning.

"Are you going to eat or not, Will?"

Will keeps his mouth closed in defiance. He can hear Jack in the background now, muttering something about - about a *starling. Is there a bird in here?* he thinks hazily. He thinks back to the time they found a woman in a horse, and a starling inside of *her.* It was still alive, it was her beating heart. Life inside of death, a new hope in spite of the darkness of oblivion. He wants to think about it more when he realizes the tube is down his nose and it is still going lower. It stings, it will sting more to pull it back out.

"My job is to keep you alive until you *die,* Will," Frederick says sharply, the smug tone almost too overbearing. It's as fake and tacky as the strawberry-flavored substance that starts dripping down the tube. He can feel each and every drop as it drips into his stomach. One drop at a time, it seems.

It's too much, it's their idea of Chinese water torture.

Drip.

Drop.

Drip.

Drop.

He'd rather drown in the fake strawberry meal replacement. It feels like it goes on for hours.

He doesn’t look at anything except the blank, white ceiling and the sterile lights. He can still hear Jack talking to Frederick, still talking about birds. He decides to crack, in order to get it to stop. There is a pounding in his stomach, in his chest. It sounds like wings flapping, beating against his ribcage. He takes as deep a breath as he can before screaming.

It’s awkward, screaming with a feeding tube down your nose, because it feels as though it’s trying to make you swallow your own screams.

He opens his mouth and screams, and watches as hundred of black starlings come flying out of his mouth, scraping against his teeth and jaw and cawing like mad. The stale white surgical lights are dotted out by hundred of birds, and as his own screaming fades and he feels himself passing out again, Will laughs around the tube, and fades into the black again.

Hannibal’s dreams are interrupted by a scream, and he sits up, startled. He looks down at Will, as they are in his mind palace, trying to sleep away this prison sentence.

“What's wrong?” Will mumbles, sleep slurring his voice as he extends a hand out of the warmth from underneath the sheets and touches Hannibal’s arm lightly. “What is it?”

“I heard you screaming.”

“Right here, ’m right here, not screaming. Go back to sleep, I’m the one with the overactive imagination, remember?” he smiles slightly. "Come on, come back to bed."

Hannibal then slides back under the sheets beside Will, who is already back asleep. But he cannot join him in sleep. No, something troubles the back of Hannibal’s mind.

Anticipation, but for what, he does not know.

He also does not know why when he does fall back asleep, his dreams are filled with the sounds of wings flapping.

Eglė the Queen of Serpents

Chapter Summary

Season 4 dreams...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Hannibal Lecter was dead.

That was the first thing the FBI told Will when he woke up in the hospital room, hooked up to incessantly beeping machines. Not even the bullet wound hurt as much as his broken heart. The tears leaked freely from his eyes, blurring out the world.

He wasn't allowed to see the body, no matter how many times he begged. The argument of them being legally wed with the papers to prove it was discarded. He was told that Hannibal was cremated and the ashes scattered far and wide. He was no more, he was *safe* now.

So all Will was left with were the memories. Memories of Cuba, Argentina, Russia, a month in Paris. Memories of bloody knives, of home cooking, of soft beds and warm kisses.

Of the sound of bullets as Hannibal pressed one last kiss to Will's lips before the world went black.

They tried to remove his wedding ring soon after he woke up. He bit right through the finger of the nurse like a carrot, and when he woke up from the sedatives, the ring was gone. He tried to stab the next nurse with his IV needle before breaking down into tears.

Jack came to see him, looking solemn. "I'm sorry it took us this long to find you, Will." *Not that we killed your one true love.*

It hurt to turn to his side but Will did anyway, staring at the clock on the pristine white wall. "I wish you had left me dead."

Jack didn't have much to say after that, and Will didn't care to listen to anything else. He retreated into his mind and stayed there.

Will wasn't arrested for his crimes, even though he begged. He wanted the death penalty, he'd prove he was sane, just let them throw the switch, inject the needle. He was pronounced legally insane and unaware of his actions due to "mental manipulation," and put back into the BSHCI for "treatment."

He didn't care.

He didn't care when Frederick came to have his little required sessions, still the same smirk on a new face.

Frederick hadn't found that funny. *Hannibal would have.*

Will didn't bother to keep count of the days he'd been locked up. What was the point?

Frederick informed him one day it had been exactly one year, and he was eligible to be let go for good behavior. Will bit down hard on the orderly's cheek immediately, ripping clean through the skin, leaving a hole. It reminded him of Cordell, and Hannibal's proud smirk. His heart clenched at the memory.

He clung to the memories like a lifeline, retreating into his mind palace for days without coming back out.

"I miss you," Will whispers brokenly, laying against Hannibal's chest. They are in bed, all the windows open with the curtains blowing in the window. It is a hot Cuban night, but the sheets were cool to the touch. Hannibal's hand was resting comfortably on Will's hip, holding him close.

"I know, my love."

"I miss hearing that, too. I want to be with you, we-we never should have left the house that day, should have spent all day in bed. They never would have found us then."

Hannibal's laugh is low in his chest, and he brushes a lock of hair from Will's face in reverence before kissing him softly.

"We'll be together again, Will, I promise you. And soon."

Will leans up to kiss him again when a smug voice shattered his fantasy.

"Will, you have a visitor," Frederick said, barely able to contain his enjoyment at Will's annoyance. "A *very* lovely young woman," he smirked as he looked her over.

Will turned over in his cot to see that there was indeed a young woman there. Her cold glare at Frederick was amusing and welcome as she removed her file from his hand herself.

"Thank you, Doctor, but I can handle myself," she said firmly. She was no nonsense, Will could appreciate that.

Frederick quirked an eyebrow before saying, "Whatever you say, *Miss* Starling." Clarice stopped paying attention to him then, turning it all over to Will.

"Mr. Graham, I'm with the Bureau," she stated, taking a seat in an uncomfortable plastic chair set out for her. Will looked her over.

“Agent...*Starling,* was it?” he asked. She nodded. “That’s a temporary badge, you’re still in training.”

“Yes sir. Jack Crawford sent me.”

Will sneered at the very name, rolling his eyes. “Jack sent me a trainee. A *trainee.* Still the same man. What do you want, Agent Starling?”

She visibly straightened up, but not out of fear. She was tough, she knew who she was dealing with. “Mr. Graham, are you aware of the ‘Buffalo Bill’ killer?”

“He skins his hides,” Will answered, he was indeed aware of the killer. He'd been allowed a hard copy of TattleCrime now and again. “Waste of the meat, in my opinion.”

He had to give Agent Starling credit, she didn't flinch at his sinister smile as he said that, unlike the the way Frederick noticeably looked away whenever he didn’t want to be bothered.

“Why the hell does Jack have you in here talking to me, Agent Starling?" Will asked again. "You look very smart, very practical. You don’t deserve to be here.”

“I’m here to ask you for your insight into the case, sir," she replied.

Will broke out laughing. It bordered on hysterical, because he just could not fucking believe that Jack would be *that-* “J-Jack Crawford pulled you out of class, didn’t he? Told you that this was how you would *really* make a difference?”

“Yes sir.”

“He’s going to break you and then use you until the end,” he managed to say in between bouts of laughter. “Look at me, Agent Starling. I’m broken so far that I’ll never be put back together, and he’s *still* using me. Did he tell you about Miriam Lass, about what happened to her? You’ll snap like a twig and he’ll rub both pieces together to burn himself a fire to keep warm. *That’s* what he’ll do to you, you realize that?”

“Regardless,” she continued on, not letting his words get to her, “The Bureau is offering you a deal on your own terms if you help with the case. What do you want, I’m sure it can be provided.”

“What do *I* want?” Will asked himself out loud, sarcasm evident in his voice, as well as bitterness. “I want Hannibal back. If you can do *that,* Agent Starling, I’ll tell you anything you want.”

Clarice sighed, she knew this wouldn’t be easy, she was warned he was stubborn. “Fine. I’m leaving some evidence for you, anyway. At least think on it, sir.”

“I think that he can kill all the girls we wants, and I *still* wouldn’t care,” Will spat, turning away. “Goodbye, Agent Starling. And think over what I told *you.”*

Seeing as Will wasn't going to speak to her anymore, Clarice slid the evidence through the mail slot. He made no attempt to get up and look over the papers.

Dr. Chilton walked her out and kept talking to her, she didn't want to listen, she was planning her next meeting already. She lit up a cigarette outside and that sent him scurrying, maybe that had been too mean. She breathed out the dark smoke with her own frustrations.

Will laid back on his cot, squeezed his eyes shut and thought about braised pork and lips that tasted like the bottom of a mojito.

Jack had something to show Clarice in his office. He pulled her out of class again, and Clarice made a mental note for Ardelia to give her the notes for the lecture she would be missing.

“What is it, sir?” she sighed taking the seat opposite from him. “I’ve been to see Graham again, I haven’t gotten anything from him. I’m doing my best though, sir.”

Jack said nothing, both hands clasped together, looking deep in thought. Then he finally spoke. “Starling, I’m about to show you something confidential. You have proved trustworthy in all of your cases and are top of your class in all areas. But you cannot break this trust.”

“You have my word, sir.”

Jack hesitated, a hand over his computer mouse before he very decidedly clicked on a link that led to a security camera.

Clarice’s gasp was barely audible.

“Sir,” she whispered. There was no need to whisper, they were alone, but it still felt appropriate. “That - that’s - he’s dead, sir.”

Jack’s glare at the screen was cold as ice as he watched a very much alive Hannibal Lecter drawing silently at his desk in his own cell in the BSHCI.

“I wish he was, Starling."

Clarice didn't know why she felt the cold rush of anger down her spine. She didn't like being lied to, she didn't like lying, period. “Your old profiler is a wreck because he thinks Lecter's dead. He-”

“Will’s recovery is *dependent* on believing that Hannibal Lecter is dead,” Jack spat, his own anger rising.

“His death is more certain,” Clarice replied, keeping her cool. “You know he hardly eats on his own now, he-”

“Buffalo Bill is your priority, Starling. Not Will Graham.”

“Of course not, sir. I forgot, he’s *yours.”*

Jack’s glare was directed at her now. “Go, Starling. I want you back in here at eight sharp tomorrow, with a list of questions for Hannibal, you will be interviewing him instead.”

Clarice dropped the textbooks she was holding, she was so startled. He wanted her to *what?*

“What?” she asked though her teeth. “Lecter, sir? You know what happened the *last time* you consulted with Lecter on a case. And - and you want *me* in there? Why *me?”*

“I need you as the go-between, Starling. Maybe you can appeal to his sensitivities, get him interested enough to talk.”

“Sir, he’s a monster.”

Jack nodded his head, sipping his coffee. “I know, Starling. The devil himself.”

“Then why do I have to sell *my* soul to fuel your obsession with those two?” Clarice snapped, angry that she was put in the middle of this game of chess without her consent.

“You’re not.” Then Jack stood up. “I need to talk to Zeller and Price, you can read through the files on my desk.”

“Sir?”

“What?” he asked, exasperated.

She swallowed. “Does Lecter... *know* Graham’s alive?”

Jack paused. “No,” he said finally. “He was told Will died at the hospital.”

Clarice stood there staring at Lecter’s mugshot on Jack’s desk, a cold feeling of dread in her stomach.

“Hey, girl,” Ardelia called over from where she was at the kitchen table, her work spread out all over it. She noticed the troubled look on her roommate/girlfriend's face. “You look sick. You want some tea?”

Clarice smiled, shaking her head. “I don’t think tea can solve my problems right now, Ardelia.”

“No problem can’t be solved with a cup of tea,” she said back, getting up to put the kettle on to boil. “What did Crawford want, dragging you out of lecture, again. Doesn't he know you need to pass or they’ll recycle you through?”

Clarice rolled her eyes, then started telling her everything. Ardelia was the most trustworthy person she knew, self-serving, but always ready to help out. She nodded after Clarice told her the whole story, and she spread out all of her files onto the kitchen counter.

“Damn, girl, double date with *two* psychopaths tomorrow. I wish I had that kind of a social life.”

Clarice snorted a little, it felt good to laugh. “They don’t *know* about each other, Ardelia.”

Ardelia gave her a look remnants of the one she gave the guy who asked her if she was into threesomes since she was bisexual. “What the fuck? Bitch, that’s the dumbest thing I’ve ever heard. All the stuff I’ve read about those two, that dissertation by Dr. Du Maurier, *all* that says that Hannibal Lecter and Will Graham are a tour-de-force together, but apart? Remember that night the police almost caught Lecter? Three people close to death, one teenage girl dead. It’s like keeping the pin taught on a grenade. And - and Jack Crawford wants *you* to talk to him?”

Clarice shrugged before lighting a cigarette and walking over to the window to smoke out of it. Ardeila could tell that she was nervous, upset, angry. She looked down at the files, pulled out the pictures of Lecter and Graham in the hospital after their recapture and bringing them over to her.

“Hey,” she said in a lighter tone, trying to get her to smile, “Look at the bruising. Who had to document their hickies, at least that’s not *your* job.”

Clarice giggled then, actually giggled. “Yeah, yeah, guess you got a point.” Then she sobered up again, taking a long drag. “But I can’t believe that Crawford wants me to talk to him. Why *me?”*

“Easy,” Ardelia said, tossing the photos over to the coffee table. “He knows he can't get anything out of him himself. He’s using you as bait.”

“I’m not bait,” Clarice spat, hissing as a little ash got on her fingers. “I’m not playing that game, that’s not why I signed up to be an agent. He - he told me that he wanted me because I could empathize with the victims of Buffalo Bill and I could be an asset to the case. But now, I’m just- I’m just his pawn, his pawn in that warped chess game he’s been playing with those two for years.”

“Okay, bitch,” Ardelia interrupted. ‘Bitch’ was a term of endearment for each other, this didn’t phase Clarice. “You are nobody’s goddamn pawn, you hear me? You beat me in chess all the time, girl. You aren’t going to let them break you. Not you, Clarice. Not you.”

She kissed her gently on the cheek, smiling softly. “Let me make you some tea, and go over what you’re going to do tomorrow, what you’re going to say.”

Clarice smiled back, stubbing the cigarette on the windowsill, flicking the butt out the window. “Yeah. Thanks, girl.”

“No problem. Besides, I can't let Lecter eat you, where am I ever going to find another roommate/girlfriend who can iron a blazer five minutes before class starts?”

“Jesus, Starling,” Jack breathed out, hand over his chest as he leaned against the doorframe. “What are you doing, sitting my office in the dark?”

She shrugged from where she sat in his chair barely outlined by the light coming in from the hallway. “Thinking about cannibalism.”

Jack shook his head, gathering his coat from the rack. “We leave in five minutes, be out front.”

“Sure thing.”

“And Starling,” he said, pausing before speaking again. “Be careful with Lecter.”

She laughed, her face hidden by the darkness. She threw her hands up. “A little late for that, don’t you think, sir?”

“Starling-”

“I know what I said, sir,” she said firmly, and Jack could just make out her eyes in the darkness. His stomach twisted at the coldness in them. He turned and left, leaving her to her thoughts, even if he knew it was dangerous.

Clarice sat by herself, in the darkness, the only light coming in from crack in the door. Her fingers ran over the pictures of Hannibal and Will in front of her. The one of them collapsed onto the ground, bullet wounds and all while still clutching desperately to each other. It looked like some tortured painting, with the blood and dirt staining their pristine clothes, tears streaming down their cheeks.

Will Graham empathized with killers, that was how he caught them. She empathized with the victims.

And that was her key.

Hannibal and Will, they could kill her in a second. *Pretend the lion is not in the room.*

They have no ties to humanity, only to each other. Appeal to that. Find an opening, and don’t bother to lie.

Now, she needed to forge trust with Lecter, a task no one had ever accomplished except for Will Graham. How did that start? What attracted Lecter to Graham, what was the *first* way Hannibal examined someone?

It suddenly dawned on her, and it made her smile. She laughed outright in the car, and Crawford looked unnerved at the sound.

Clarice collected the evidence from Will's mailslot, lingering just long enough for Will to move forward and grab her hand through the opening. She did not panic, she wasn't going to let him see her panic. She had to have faith he wasn't going to hurt her. Maybe not *yet,* at least.

Something like amusement twinkled in Will's eyes as noticed her faking, and made no attempt to hurt her, just held onto her hand. Guards separated them before any damage was done, but Clarice had what she wanted.

Will smiled in her direction, even as he was sedated under Chilton's orders. She found herself smiling back.

She purposely ignored all of Chilton's ramblings and shallow flattery as they walked down endless hallways to where Lecter was kept. She did catch one phrase he made just before they arrived at the cell.

"Oh, are you *ever* to Lecter's taste, if you'll excuse the phrase, *Miss* Starling. He has quite a fondness for pretty brunettes," he said in such a sleazy tone that she wanted to take a shower. She sent him a fake smile in return.

"I graduated from UVA, Dr. Chilton, it wasn't a charm school," she fired back, then tuning out any other comment he tried to make. And at any rate, anything he had to say stopped immediately as Hannibal Lecter looked at him from his restraints in the chair by his desk in his cell. He looked at Chilton like he was a piece of gum stuck on the bottom of a shoe. At any rate, he brightened when Clarice was seated in front of him.

"Clarice, isn't it?" he asked with a gracious smile. *Funny, it's only Lecter and Graham that haven't treated me like a piece of meat here, she thought.*

"Yes sir, Dr. Lecter."

"Appalachian upbringing, but repressed. Still visible in the slight accent. You take your coffee black. And perfectly *dreadful* apple-scented shampoo. Far too overbearing," he stated, looking bored already with the situation before him.

Clarice had been thoroughly briefed on Lecter. The fire had mostly gone out since capture, he hardly tried to attack anyone now. He had only maimed one doctor since his stay, just enough to ensure the insanity defense. He had made no attempt to escape.

No point with no one to share it with, she thought silently.

Hannibal's wrists were attached to the table by handcuffs, he folded them against the table, smiling at her as though they were on a pleasant lunch date.

"What is this meeting for, Clarice?" he asked. "The Buffalo Bill killings, perhaps? I'm afraid I am not the correct man for the job. *He* is dead now."

She didn't miss the coldness in his eyes at that statement. "Be that as it may, doctor, I still have some questions for you, and some evidence for you to look over."

Lecter looked unamused until she reached her hand across the table, deliberately too close. He inhaled her scent, then visibly froze, eyes subtly recognizing the scent on her hand. One he hadn't smelled in over a year.

One he never thought he would smell again.

"Obsession," Clarice said nonchalantly. This surprised him enough to nearly let his mask slip in front of this remarkable young woman.

"I beg your pardon?"

"Obsession For Women. My perfume, in case you were wondering." A blatant lie, but then he understood what she *meant,* she was telling him a secret without speaking out loud. *What a clever girl.*

She opened her mouth to ask about the case, he brushed her off with a wave of a chained hand. He was going to tell her a secret back, then.

"Let me tell you a story, Clarice. A story from my home. Then you share one from your home. Quid pro quo, Clarice. And then I will tell you about your man."

She had no choice but to sit in the chair and be enthralled with an old Lithuanian fairy tale.

Once upon a time, there was a beautiful maiden named Eglė who was bathing with her sisters in the stream. A serpent, named Žilvinas, crawled into the sleeve of her discarded dress, and declared that he would only leave if she pledged herself to him. She agreed.

Her family and kingdom did everything in their power to save Eglė from her fate. They offered up countless other, lower creatures instead, but Žilvinas would not be fooled. Instead, he took his love to his kingdom at the bottom of the sea, where they lived happily for many years.

Until one day, Eglė returns to visit her family on the land, and they decide to keep her with them forever. They learned the secret, that Eglė will call out to the sea for her husband:

If alive – may the sea foam milk

If dead – may the sea foam blood

They call for Žilvinas, and as he emerges from the sea, his love's family attack him and chop him into little pieces and scatter them in the wind. They did not tell Eglė what they had done.

So when it came time for Eglė to return to her love, she called to the sea:

If alive – may the sea foam milk

If dead – may the sea foam blood

But only blood foamed from the sea, and she cried out in despair at what had been done to her love. In retaliation, she turned herself into a steadfast evergreen, so that her family could

not have her back and she would remain in devotion to her love.

“That’s a lovely story, doctor, but what has that got to do with me?” Clarice asked when he had finished. Hannibal's eyes went from being far away to zeroing in on her.

“It has everything to do with you,” he replied, looking at her like she was divine grace. “Clarice, occasionally I drop a teacup on the ground and I am not satisfied when it does not come together again. Does Jack view you as a fragile little teacup, Clarice? Or more like a toy he will break when he grows tired of playing with it so that one else can use it afterwards?”

She narrowed her eyes. “I am no one’s plaything, Dr. Lecter. And I certainly am not *yours.”*

“Tough mentality,” Hannibal nodded. “Impressive, truly impressive.”

And their conversation continued like that for far too long, a game of verbal ping pong. Clarice knew that he was prying into her mind, and then it was only a matter of time before- “Now tell me about your childhood. Clarice. A sad event. Something...*moving.”*

What could she do? What *should* she do? If she told him something, he’d torture her with those memories forever, bring the nightmares back. But if she didn’t...he’d find a way to tear them out of her unwillingly, and that sounded like a far worse fate.

So she told him about the lambs with cold anger rising in her throat. About how she broke in and tried to save one from her uncle's slaughter, running far into the darkness, only to be caught and sent to the Lutheran orphanage. They killed her lamb that very day.

She told him that she was helpless then. She was not going to be helpless now, she was going to save the lost lamb Catherine Martin from her slaughter. The screams she heard in her dreamswould finally stop.

Hannibal stared deep into her eyes as she told him everything. He looked intrigued, and even impressed when she felt angry tears welling up in her eyes. Crying for Clarice was not a sign of weakness, he noted. It took immense bravery for her do such a thing.

Real magic can never be made by offering someone else’s liver. You must tear out your own, and not expect to get it back.

Time was up afterwards, and she stood to leave, shaken, but eyes cold as steel.

“Thank you, Clarice,” Hannibal breathed out as she was escorted out of the cell. *“Thank you.”*

Their second meeting went much like the first. An elaborate game of chess, without one person ever having complete control of the board. Dancing in circles.

Hannibal was drawing this time. From where she was seated she couldn't tell what, exactly, but then again, she didn't really care.

"Let me see your eyes, Clarice," he said suddenly, instead of answering her question. "I'll answer the question afterwards."

"Why?" she asked, her eyes determinedly fixed on the plain table. Hannibal's voice was like the snake from the Jungle Book, the orphanage always had that movie playing.

Trussssssst in meeeeeee……

"Eyes are the truest part of the human form, Clarice. The windows to the soul. What is your soul made up of, my dear?"

Clarice looked up then, giving him a hard glare. Hannibal smiled, blinked as though he were taking a picture, then turned back to drawing. "Thank you, Clarice. Would you like this drawing once it is finished?"

"You're - you're drawing *me?"*

"I make it a habit to draw anything I find fascinating. It's the most valuable form of study, Clarice, helps distill down the physical form and imagine the mental. But your question, forgive me. I have a different answer: you don't want to catch your man, Clarice."

That got her to seriously pause. "What do you *mean,* doctor, of *course* I-"

"You want to *save Catherine*. There is a difference between wanting to catch a killer and wanting to save the innocent, Clarice. Rather *altruistic* of you. Tell me, do you crave change?"

She didn't see why that was relevant, Lecter only smiled again.

Buffalo Bill wanted to transform, he said. It was obvious, given the death's-head moth found in the victim's throat. An *imago,* a means to change. To *become.*

Buffalo Bill was an old patient of Hannibal Lecter. But did he reveal this at the top of the interview? No. He told her this as she was escorted out of the cell, and she had to be pulled back so she couldn't press him for further information.

"Skinned his ex-lover's new man. Just like a rabbit," he smiled, showing his teeth as the guards restrained him. Chilton wouldn't let her stay and ask more questions, "rules are rules, Miss Starling."

"Oh, Frederick," Hannibal *tsked,* the *image* of fake sympathy. "Don't look at Clarice like that. No woman of good taste cares for a well-done steak."

Clarice hadn't been able to hold back a smile. Hannibal had smiled back at her, glad that he could evoke such an emotion from her.

“What do you mean, you had my meeting with Lecter canceled?” Clarice spat, glaring at Jack as he sat behind his desk. He didn’t even budge as he gave her a stern look.

“Hannibal Lecter is playing with you, Starling, it’s too dangerous for you to keep seeing him. I’m canceling all of your appointments with him.”

She was close to seething now. All this work, all those hours of Lecture staring into her soul, drawing her, dragging out her past and tearing open the stitches on old wounds. “Buffalo Bill is obsesses with women, he lives to hunt women. And - and not a *single* woman is hunting him down except for me. Sir, I’m so *close,* I know I can-”

“You're right, you’re too close to Lecter,” was his sharp reply. “I’m not letting you fall into one of his traps.”

Clarice bit her lip in anger, and delivered a low blow. “I’ve had it with all you sons of bitches. If you really *had* learned from your other mistakes, you wouldn’t have pulled me out of class.”

Before Jack could yell at her, she grabbed the file off the desk and said in a calmer voice. “I’m having my last meeting. I’m going to find Catherine. Catch up.”

And then she was gone, her short pumps clicking down the hallway.

Jack tried not to think that it might be too late. Not just for Catherine, but for Clarice.

If he had been able to, Clarice was sure Hannibal wanted to touch her at their next and last meeting. Not in a skeevy sort of way, but out of curiosity, scientific interest. Touch makes things real, it builds trust. She wasn’t sure if she wanted Hannibal Lecter to trust her, and she really, truly didn’t want to trust him. Everyone who trusted him was either dead or broken, and she was getting out of this in one piece.

Chilton wouldn’t budge to let her sit across from him at a desk, they had to meet through the glass. She didn’t like that, it made the tension higher.

“How is the case, Clarice?” Hannibal asked politely. He was standing up with perfect posture, watching *her* through the glass like *she* was a specimen. “How does it make you feel?”

“Playing my therapist, Doctor?” she replied, crossing her arms. He only smiled.

“I *am* a therapist, Clarice. Answer my question.”

God, his eyes stared right through, waiting for an answer. But lying wouldn’t get you anywhere with Lecter, he could always tell. You had to tell him the truth. It was the only way to lie to him.

“I feel like Bluebeard’s wife,” she finally said, noting that Hannibal’s interest was notably piqued. “I’ve opened the wrong door, learned things I shouldn’t have learned. And it’s only a matter of time before it comes back to bite me.”

“Don’t lower yourself, Clarice,” Hannibal said after a while, contemplating her honesty. “What makes you think you are not the last wife?”

“I-”

“Buffalo Bill’s had many girls these past months. Catherine may well be the last one, now that you are her savior.”

Clarice quirked an eyebrow. “You think I’m a savior, Doctor?”

“Psalm 23. You grew up in a Lutheran orphanage, you must know it by heart.”

“Doctor-”

“The Lord is my shephard, I shall not want,” Hannibal recites, clearly enjoying himself. *“And yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil.”*

Clarice closed her eyes, in exasperation, before laughing gently to herself and saying out loud, “For I am the meanest goddamn bitch in that valley.”

Hannibal smiled at that, even as Jack came in to remove her, he thought this had gone on long enough. “You are a wonder, Clarice. You will let me know when those lambs stop screaming, won’t you?”

“Tell me where to find Buffalo Bill, doctor,” she demanded, moving closer to the glass. Hannibal sighed with his eyes, it was so blatantly fake that it made her sick. “Tell me, I gave you what you wanted.”

“I already *told* you, Clarice,” Hannibal *tsked,* amusement spread across his features. “The only man who is qualified for that job is *dead.* I do hope you haven’t wasted your precious time to save *poor* Catherine.”

“Starling, come here,” Jack ordered from the doorway. She didn’t move as Hannibal lifted the file off of his desk and brought it to his nose, closing his eyes as he inhaled deeply. Then he made his way close to the glass.

“Don't forget your case file,” he said, smirking. Clarice ignored Jack and Chilton’s orders as she went up against the glass and put her hand in the mailslot. Hannibal dragged his index finger across hers as she took the file back, staring deep into her eyes.

“Goodbye, Clarice,” he murmured, a broad smirk on his face. She found herself smiling back, to her surprise, because at the very least, he had listened to her. He had given her the key to open Will Graham. It was going to cost the Bureau, cost a lot, but then again, none of this had been *her* idea, right? She was Jack Crawford’s little pawn, right? She was stuck in a corner, she would sacrifice herself for the greater good. Even if it meant that she would be in more danger.

She felt a hand on her shoulder as she kept watching Hannibal, and did not turn around. “Dr. Chilton, if you don’t move your hand I will light up a cigarette in front of you.”

The hand instantly vanished and she smiled again, turning around and walking out of the wing herself, claiming that she was going to the lobbyHannibal looked over at Jack with an innocent look.

“Where *do* you find your people, Jack? Do you have any *more* to visit me?”

Jack glared and Chilton hissed that he was revoking privileges, taking all of his books, all of his drawings, and Hannibal kept his face blank as he twisted the hidden paperclip Chilton’s lazy guard had forgotten to remove from the file in his hand.

He went back to his desk and finished his drawing: Clarice, standing in a field of yellow flowers. All was calm around her, and she was smiling.

In her arms was a baby lamb.

Clarice did not go to the lobby like she told Jack and Chilton. She went directly to Will Graham’s cell instead, standing before the glass and ready to do business.

“I’m out of time, Mr. Graham,” she snapped, causing him to open his eyes from where he was laying on his cot. “Buffalo Bill’s going to skin Catherine either tomorrow or the next day, and I need you to tell me where he is.”

Will looked over at her, not moving from his current position. He only shrugged. He didn’t care, and she knew he wouldn’t care. Time to bring out her one remaining card.

“You’re looking at your situation all wrong, Will. I *understand* now. I can *see* you now,” she says, using his first name because she was tired of formalities. “You’re right. The teacup is never going to gather itself again. But that doesn’t mean you can’t use glue and just put the damn thing back together *yourself.”*

He suddenly sat straight up and looked at her, confusion on his face. “What - what do you know of teacups and time, Agent Starling?”

She took a page from Lecter’s book and answered his question by changing the subject to something similar yet off topic. “Hannibal Lecter was the serpent that crawled into your sleeve, he claimed you for himself. Everyone around you tried to save you from your fate, but you *chose* him. You *chose* him, and you went into the sea together. It foamed milk then, didn’t it?”

Will slowly stood up from his cot, and slowly walked to the front of the glass. Clarice mirrored his movement, until she was right up against the glass as well.

“And what does the sea foam with *now,* Agent Starling?” he said in a low voice. She didn't break eye contact, but smiled, feeling emboldened now. Now she knew what to do. She removed a picture of the most recent girl dragged out of the river, and pressed it against her glass, hard.

“Quid pro quo, Will. Where is Buffalo Bill?” she demanded. Will quirked an eyebrow at her before smiling. A real smile, she could tell he hadn't had one in over a year. He understood her now. He understood what she was telling him without saying it aloud. Veritas, bringer of truth.

He nodded at her, touching the picture through the glass.

“Deal’s a deal, Agent Starling.” he murmurs, the smile not fading. “I haven’t done this in a while, so bear with me…”

His eyes close. He doesn’t move. He barely breathes. Clarice doesn’t either.

When he speaks again, he sounds like another man altogether, a rough yet high voice, unsure of himself but definitely in charge of the situation.

“I starve them for a few days, it loosens the skin from the bones, makes it easier to remove,” he says in a far too controlled voice. Clarice realizes why Jack wanted her to talk to Will in the first place. He is comfortable crawling into the skin of killers. “The lotion is to keep the skin in top condition. The death’s head moth, a symbol of life and death, of transformation. *I* want to transform. They said I’m too unstable for the operation, even though I need to be me. I don’t want mere change, I want to *transform.* Become my true self. Since I can’t be comfortable in my *own* skin, I’ll take theirs, ” he laughs a little to himself, in a voice that is not Will Graham’s before he opens his eyes again, still smiling. He can see the gears turning in Clarice's mind.

"The skin isn't a trophy," she breathes out. "He - he's making a suit. A skin suit. That's why it's tailor precision, why he chooses larger girls."

Will nods, looking proud as he glances over her shoulder. "Adapt. Evolve. Become. She's brilliant, Jack. You've made a good choice for once."

Clarice immediately turns around and sees Jack and Chilton looking absolutely furious from the doorway. Jack barks out, “Starling, what are you-”

“I’m not done, Jack,” Will shoots back, turning his attention back to Clarice. “Two-story house. It’s how he hangs them. Near the mouth of the river, easier for dumping.” He leaned in close to the holes in the glass, and whispers to Clarice, “Jack is in the wrong corner, Agent Starling.”

“What?”

“When you find Buffalo Bill, Agent Starling,” Will says lowly, eyes flickering over to Jack before looking into hers, “you will have no choice but to kill him. Accept it now and move on. You are the black queen on a chessboard, dynamic, the most powerful piece. You are not

a pawn. Do you understand me?" He leans in close enough that she can feel his breath through the hole. "*Do you understand me, Clarice?"*

"Yes, sir. I understand you." It was the first time Will had said her name, not Agent Starling.

"Good. Good." Jack interrupts this moment of breakthrough by walking over and taking Clarice's arm.

"Starling, we need to-"

Will starts laughing then. *Laughing.* "Enough, Jack. Clarice, listen to me, he's in the wrong corner. Right box, wrong corner. Remember that, you understand? *Wrong corner."* He can't stop laughing now, everything has clicked together, this whole year of hell makes complete and utter sense now, Jack - Frederick - they've been- "Tell me how it feels when you kill him, Clarice."

He burst into full-on hysterical laughter, then, laughter that wouldn't stop.

"You - you," Will sputtered, laughing so hard he was nearly sobbing as he was injected with the needle by the guard that rushed into his cell as she is dragged out. "You - you are one *charred steak,* Frederick. I - I wouldn't even feed you to my *dogs."*

Clarice was escorted out by Jack and an annoyed, yet visibly rattled Chilton, who glared in the direction of Will, curled up on his cot as the drug took hold. "Thank God we're moving him, I can't deal with these fits anymore."

"Moving him?" she asked incredulously.

"Well, I feel it's too risky to keep them under the same roof anymore, we're having him moved in the morning," Chilton says curtly, apparently done trying to 'impress' her. Ardelia waits outside in the parking lot, she drove her over. Clarice rushes down the stairs and hugs her tight.

"What's going on, girl?"

"I think I just sold my soul," she laughs. "And I know where Bill is."

Will is recovering in a cliffside home, after the fall. There is warm herbal tea growing cold in favor of sitting by the fire, wrapped in thick blankets as Hannibal tells him the story of Eglė and her serpent prince.

His sister, Mischa, it had been her favorite story.

That had been their first kiss, that night. Will had always thought it would be wild and bloody. But no, it was soft and gentle, so unlike them. It was sweet and tender, and tasted like the salt from the sea and Hannibal's tears, and the bitter sweetness of the tea leaves.

Will dreamt of falling off the cliff over and over, into a sea foaming with milk.

Will looks at his pill assortment in the morning. There is a tiny, pale blue one that is usually never there. It is only mixed in when Frederick thinks he's being smart and Will won't notice that there is one more drug than usual. It's a heavy sedative. He palms the pill and slips it into his jumpsuit, then pretends to pass out at the time the drug knocks him out.

The guards come in and strap him in, murmuring about a transfer and carrying him out to the transport van.

He estimates it is no more than an hour and a half of pretending to be dead to the world when he hears the radio buzz

All units, all units, Lecter is missing. Repeat, Lecter is missing.

Will smiles as he easily slips an arm out of the restraint, grabbing the nearest blunt object and slamming into the face of the nearest guard.

Jack opened the passenger door to the car before it had even stopped braking, and rushed out towards the house. They had been at the wrong place. Jame Gumb was not his home address, so he sent Starling out to investigate "Jack Gordon", a tailor acquaintance of Gumb's.

Starling - *Starling* was in trouble, he felt it in his bones. He was in the middle of barking out orders to the agents around him when shots rang out from inside the house, no, under the house.

Jack charged ahead while the other agents tried to get him to wait, no, he wasn't waiting. He burst into the of the house and charged down the stairs to the basement, flinging open the door.

He didn't know if he was relieved or horrified at what he saw.

Clarice was frantically reloading her gun, pointing at the gurgling figure of Buffalo Bill, wearing night-vision goggles, a handgun cooked in his hand. He stopped breathing as they both watched.

Starling looked up, the light from above allowing Jack a good look at her face. His stomach sank because it reminded him of when he found Miriam Lass in that pit, blinded by the sudden light from above. There was blood spattered across her face, she had shot him at close range. But what was truly frightening was her expression. Her coating of lambs' wool, of softness and gentleness, was gone. The look in her eyes was that of a wolf, hidden under the sheepskin this whole time. The look of someone who had taken a life and did not regret it.

“Jack?”

He was brought back into reality by her snapping her fingers. “Starling, you need-”

“A ladder, Catherine’s safe, but he kept her in a pit, I gotta get her out.”

“Are - are you alright, Starling?”

She nodded, shaking a little from adrenaline. “He was tracking me. Cut the power in the basement, tracked me in the darkness. Heard him cock his gun behind me, I was faster on the trigger.”

“I’m sorry you had to resort to-”

She just shrugged, swallowing hard to force her adrenaline levels to go down. “I knew I’d have to kill him.”

Jack had seen the tape of her last meeting with Will, of what he’d told her, looking serious and so like Hannibal it made him sick. But before he could brush those thoughts aside, his phone rang. He answered it with an abrupt, “Crawford, FBI. Dr - Dr. Chilton, *calm down,* what? You’re at the new institution, and Will is- you don’t *know?* What do you *mean* you don’t- Hannibal is what? *What?* That’s impossible, he wouldn’t escape, he doesn't *have* anyo-”

“I need you to be the go-between, Starling.”

Will had grabbed Starling’s hand but made no effort to hurt her, just to shake her up. Then she met Hannibal. Hannibal had taken a noticeable sniff of her, he thought it was to unnerve her.

Scent-marking.

"Why do I have to sell my soul to fuel your obsession with those two?”

“I need you to be the go-between, Starling.”

He ignored Chilton’s frantic babbling as he watched Starling survey her kill, running her gloved fingers over the bullet holes in his chest. She was cool, she was collected. Corrupted - no. This was her-

-becoming.

Hannibal had finished stringing up the remains of his least favorite guard against the bars of his cell, a lovely distorted angel figure. He was left with plenty of time to get into the man’s car with his keys and escape.

He hadn’t made it more than thirty miles down the road when he saw what he had been hoping for. A transport vehicle, crashed into a ditch. He pulled over to inspect the scene.

The driver was dead, head smacked so hard into the steering wheel that his neck had snapped. It looked as though something had frightened him enough to run the car off the road.

Hannibal’s heart seized up as he pried open the back of the vehicle. Between the two dead, mutilated guards was, *“Will.”*

The man in question's face was buried in his hands, soaked in blood, but looked up at the sound of his voice. Tears welled up in his eyes as he croaked out, *“Hannibal.”*

No symphony would *ever* be as beautiful as the sound of Will saying his name.

Will stood up, hesitant. “How - how do I know I’m not still dreaming, still stuck in my head?”

Hannibal reached his arms out for an embrace. “Come here and discover for yourself.”

Will didn’t need to be asked twice, running and jumping out of the vehicle and into Hannibal's arms, squeezing him tightly. They were both openly crying now.

“Oh God, they told me-”

“-you were dead-”

“-lied to me-”

“-you’re alive, my *love-”*

“Kiss me,” Will pleaded, not waiting for an answer but instead pulling Hannibal down into a deep, blistering kiss that they both drowned in. They *sounded* like they were drowning, at least, only breaking apart when they absolutely had to breathe.

“Hannibal,” Will wheezed, trying in vain to get his heart to stop beating so fast. “Get us out of the fucking country on the next fucking flight out. Morocco, Russia, fucking New Zealand, I don’t care, I just want out, and we’re staying in the first motel we see because I want you now, and I am this close to having you on the side of the damn road.”

“Later, Will, I promise,” Hannibal smiled. “Let us go.”

Twenty-seven hours after they escaped, they had stopped in the first shitty motel in the Bahamas that they found. Hannibal presses Will up against the door as soon as they drop

their bags. He has a hand on Will's throat, and Will tilts his head back, leaning into it. If he wanted, Hannibal could squeeze until he turned blue or snap his neck.

"Tell me, Will. Would you ever say to me *'stop, stop, if you loved me you'd stop?'"*

Will groans, a smile spreading across his face. *"Not in a thousand years."*

"Not in a thousand years," Hannibal repeated, staring at Will like he was sent down directly from heaven. "That's my boy."

Will let out a breathy laugh, then reached out and pulled Hannibal into a deep kiss.

"Got a package, girl," Ardelia said as Clarice lets herself in. "Japanese woman hand-delivered it, says it's from her benefactor. He was apparently impressed enough with your story to send you a gift."

"Aren't I special?"

"Hell yeah. I'm gonna go and finish getting dressed for the big party in your honor. Package is on the counter."

Clarice nodded, opening the package as Ardeila leaves the room. She carefully unwraps a teacup, and her heart sinks. The teacup is done in the kuriski style, where the teacup is broken and then put back together with gold filling the cracks, making it stronger than before. As if on cue, at that moment, her phone rings. She answers with an abrupt, "Starling."

"Hello, Clarice," purred a familiar voice on the other side of the line. "Have the lambs stopped screaming?"

"Dr. Lecter," she hissed. "They will trace this phone, and how did you-"

"Don't worry, Clarice." She could hear the smirk in his voice. "I hold no ill will towards you, none whatsoever. The world is far more interesting with you in it, my dear."

"Why are you-"

"The sea foamed milk, Clarice," Hannibal smiled, looking over at Will, who was flipping through the selections on the electronic jukebox. "Will wishes to know how it felt to kill Buffalo Bill."

Clarice takes a deep breath, and smiles in spite of herself. "Righteous."

"Righteous. Fascinating."

"Where are you, Dr. Lecter?"

"Now, you know I can't tell you that, Clarice. Now, extend us the same courtesy and don't come looking for us."

"You know I can't make that promise, doctor."

Hannibal smiles, leaning back in his chair in the hotel bar. "I do wish we could speak more, Clarice, but unfortunately, we're expecting dinner to arrive any moment now."

"Dr. Lecter-" And then the line goes dead. Clarice looks down at the phone in her hand, then very decidedly wraps the teacup back up again, and shoves it under her bed.

Hannibal hung up the cell phone, walking over to the bar to hand the bartender the cell phone, mentioning that the man on the end had lost it. He was thanked, and was even bought a drink. He took the drink over to his seat on the leather couch at the lounge. Will popped some quarters into the jukebox and chose a song, scooping up his own drink and taking a seat on the other side of the couch. Sinatra's *I'll Be Seeing You* started to play, and Will hummed along, causing Hannibal to smile. Hannibal lifts Will's hand that wasn't holding his drink and kisses his new wedding ring. Will winks.

"Sentiment shouldn't suit you so well," he sighs, taking a sip before grinning. "In your medical opinion, doctor, what's the most useless organ in the human body?"

Hannibal thinks for a moment. "The spleen, perhaps? It has a more earthy flavor than the appendix, and less likely to rupture."

"Perfect. Stuff it with strawberries," Will smirks as they watch Frederick Chilton finished his conversation with Jack on the phone as he dragged his suitcase into the lobby. He accepts the keys and makes his way to the elevator. He gets in when the door opens, but a hand prevents the door from closing, and the elevator opened up again. He drops the suitcase onto the floor hard enough that the clasp springs open when he sees the two blocking his only exit.

Hannibal's smirk made his heart fall into his shoes, and his arm was around Will, hand resting possessively on Will's hip.

"Going up?" Will asks, peering over the top of his sunglasses, eyes full of mischief.

Chapter End Notes

PLEASE PLEASE PLEASE leave all the comments and kudos you like! I respond to all comments as soon as possible, so please leave a comment, loves! Thank you for reading and enjoying!

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!